

BK _ TO COMEDY SCENE DIRECTORS AT MID-SEMESTER

As we are about to embark on the second half of the semester I want to take a moment to

REBOOT

I've been reading your blog posts and reflections and Scene Analysis worksheets and I want to address some of the concerns you've shared and clarify some concepts that continue to be unclear.

COURAGE

I don't want anyone getting discouraged if your first attempts at rehearsing these scenes draw strong critiques from me. There's no doubt more to this directing thing than you may have realized. It takes lots of time and practice before it becomes second nature. That's true of any art, craft or sport — so why should we expect directing to be different?

Perhaps because the written surface of the scene seems self-evident and that leads us to believe that directing is shooting the actors saying the words. Now you know it is not.

BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELVES

Remember when you were learning to drive?

My neighborhood has relatively wide and quiet streets and it is used by a lot of Driving Schools to give lessons to beginning students. I watch these lessons all the time. Can you remember your first few weeks of driving? When every step was separated from every other? When you had to make an awkward, conscious effort to coordinate operations to run the car? How different is that from the "unconscious" way you are able to drive now? That is the effect that practice, repetition and experience have on a skill. The semester so far is like your first few weeks of driving lessons. The only way to really be able to drive is to keep at it.

CROSSWORD PUZZLES AND THE TEN THOUSAND HOURS

Some of you are, no doubt, feeling anxious about the 10,000 hours. Don't be too hard on yourselves. Don't get frustrated if your fourth or fifth or sixth rehearsal is not yet perfect...

Others of you accept the concept of 10,000 hours, but cannot imagine where those hours of practice are going to come from.

Think for a moment: do you, or possibly does someone you know, do the New York Times crossword puzzle? You may know people who complete it every day...even some who can do it pretty quickly. If you are like me you are someone who occasionally tries a hand at it, and labors for a while before giving up in frustration. What is difference? Daily practice. People who do the puzzle every day aren't smarter...they've just seen the puzzle many more times. They begin to recognize patterns and anticipate the direction the puzzle is moving...

To be able to quickly and effectively diagnose the problem with (challenge of) a scene, you need to have solved the puzzle of many scenes. Just like the NY Times!

Where are you going to get that experience? When you leave here and try to make your movies happen you will find that you have plenty of "spare" time. Either you'll be writing (which you can't do 24/7) or fundraising (which you also can't do 24/7) or working at a "bread job"....I recommend that your recreation become scene workshops. Look at it as going to the gym. If you only do it three times a year there's no benefit. But put in a weekly workout...you'll achieve the ten thousand hours roughly around the time you actually get to make that first feature!

OVERNIGHT SUCCESS

In a blog post someone mentioned that some very successful directors are young, or have early success. To the blogger that fact seemed to challenge the importance of 10,000 hours. First of all, there are exceptions to every rule. My advice is "don't bank on being the exception." Also, if you read about the 10,000 hours in Gladwell's "Outliers" you'll realize that the young Beatles had the hours as did the young Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. Does anybody think Melissa McCarthy (this year's breakout) is an overnight success? Read this:

<http://www.lamag.com/laculture/lstory/2013/02/08/melissa-mccarthy>

REPETITION

Many of you are struggling with the issue of rehearsal burnout. You worry about your actors getting stale – but actually, many of you are discovering that YOU quickly get stale. That is to say, your senses get dull, you get bored with the scene and you struggle to imagine what to do next.

I believe you have to force yourself past this dulling point. It's your senses that need training. You need to train yourself to stay fresh...to see and hear with fresh eyes...for long hours day after day. That's what is needed of you on a film set.

No two moments are the same. The reason they seem the same to you is because you are being seduced by the surface...the words...you are only hearing the script

and the voice in your head that is telling you how it thinks the words should be said. What you must be looking and listening for is what is happening in your actors' eyes when they see what another character is doing to them and hear what is REALLY being said.

As I write this I am watching a terrific young tennis player hit balls in practice. She has been playing since she was maybe four years old. Now she is a high school senior who has just received a full scholarship to play for USC. She hits with her coach for two hours after school every day. Ball after ball after ball. The secret is: NO TWO BALLS ARE THE SAME. Each ball is different. Each moment is different. Each has to be experienced and played individually. If you are trying to play the ball before or the next ball, you will surely miss. You have to see and meet each ball individually in the moment that it presents itself. The coach is trying to keep this young player in the state you want your actors to get to in rehearsal. When you (they) do it right it doesn't get boring or stale because each moment, each challenge is new.

DIRECTING GREAT ACTORS AND MOVIE STARS

Several people have wondered how what we are doing with our actors in class relates to how Jay Roach, for example, described working with DeNiro, Stiller, Owen Wilson etc. The simple answer is some things remain the same and some things are very different. The odds are, actors of that caliber will come prepared to REACT IN THE MOMENT. They probably won't need to be reminded to LISTEN. They will likely bring a PHYSICAL LIFE with them and want to express it in ACTIVITY that is consistent with their character goals. Also they are less likely to be mesmerized by the words. In other words, they come "ready to play". Most of the actors we've been seeing need much more priming. In that sense movie stars will be easier to direct. But you have to prove yourself by doing creditable work with rookies and journeymen before you get the chance to work with stars. The great actors may bring a lot of ideas – some of which you will like and some of which you won't. By having a thorough analysis of the CIRCUMSTANCES AND FACTS of the story, you will be able to respond to them in a persuasive manner. Finally, all actors are the same. They are all insecure and self-conscious. They can't see themselves acting and, therefore, they all need outside eyes they can trust. That is what you are training yourself to be - OUTSIDE EYES. It's more important to develop great eyes than great ideas!

ONE DIRECTION AT A TIME

Many of you are still trying to direct (and correct) the whole scene rather than work with your actors moment by moment. For the sake of your actors, SLOW DOWN...let them experience one change at a time. Let one adjustment lead to another. Their experience will seem more ORGANIC. That way it will have a more profound effect

on their performances. Even if you have four steps in your head...and even if they all prove to be good moves...dole them out slowly so that they can be absorbed into the mix. Think of it like mixing a batter for pancakes...you want to pour the milk slowly into the powder and stir while doing it...not dump all the milk in, and then have to labor like hell stirring, to get out all the lumps that have formed as a consequence.

MISCONCEPTIONS AND MISCOMMUNICATIONS

1. Using Personal Experience - I seem to have said something that has made some of you think that I frown on giving examples and making analogies drawn from personal experience. I don't. There is absolutely nothing wrong with saying, "you know when you get a brain freeze from a slurpy...." Or "when I was a kid my mom always made me put on a shoe and tie that shoe's lace before I could put on the other shoe..." or whatever - in service of connecting an actor to an experience in the script. I'm not sure what I said to give a contrary impression. Sorry.

2. Many of you are trying to apply YAY/BOO line by line. I never intended that. I suggest that it works for the beginning and end of the scene. It probably works for Beats and Moments. Not every line is a moment.

3. On the Scene Analysis Worksheet all questions are to be answered pertaining to where the characters are BEFORE the dialogue of the scene begins. Some of you are telling me what happens in the scene. I want to know about the actors' intentions coming into the scene.

I'LL LET YOU IN ON A SECRET

Not all prompts on the Scene Analysis Worksheet will require an answer. It is possible, for example, for a character to come into a scene with an upfront Agenda (Want) and not have a hidden agenda. It's for you to decide. But I advise you to think hard about it before arriving at your answer. That's called "doing your homework." (:

I'LL LEAVE YOU WITH A QUOTE

"I passionately believe that in art, and certainly in the theater, there are only two questions, and just like in life or analysis, if you've ever been through either of those, the same thing is learned over and over and over—it's always the same thing and you keep thinking, "why didn't I remembered from last time?" But you don't. The first question is: "what is this really when it happens in life?" Not what is the accepted

convention, not what do we do always do when this comes up, but what is it really like? And the other question we really have to ask is, "what happens next?".

Mike Nichols